

Osborne not focusing on national title

By Jeff Singer
Senior Reporter

For now, Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne would prefer to deal with reality.

He'd rather not hear anything about winning the "mythical" national title, a fantasy in college football since it's determined on a vote by sportswriters and broadcasters.

Instead, Osborne's philosophy this season is to play hard and let the chips fall where they may.

"You can't go out and win a national championship — you have to have a national championship voted to you," Osborne said. "I just want us to play as well as we can and we'll see how the votes come out in the end."

Osborne, who enters his 20th season at Nebraska as the nation's most winning coach, didn't have the votes go his way last season as the 9-2-1 Huskers were ranked 15th and 16th in the major polls following Nebraska's 22-0 loss in the Orange Bowl to eventual co-national champion Miami.

Osborne said the Huskers should have the talent to contend for a national title this year.

"We're looking forward to the season," Osborne said. "It's been one of our better preparation periods, so we think we're going to have a good football team this year."

The problem for the Huskers, Osborne said, is that Big Eight rivals Colorado, Oklahoma and an improved Kansas team will also have talented teams in 1992.

"We've got good athletes, but (Colorado coach) Bill McCartney will say the same thing, (Oklahoma coach)

Gary Gibbs will be able to say the same thing and (Kansas coach) Glen Mason will say the same thing," Osborne said.

But don't pity Osborne too much. He has 13 starters returning, including six players on offense and seven on defense.

The six returning offensive starters helped contribute to the Huskers' lead in the conference in total offense last season with an average of 506.5 yards per game.

I-back Derek Brown, who earned All-Big Eight honors last year by rushing for 1,313 yards, heads the list of returnees on offense.

Others returning to lead the Huskers' offensive charge include fullback Lance Lewis, tight end William Washington, guard Will Shields, tackle Lance Lundberg and center Jim Scott.

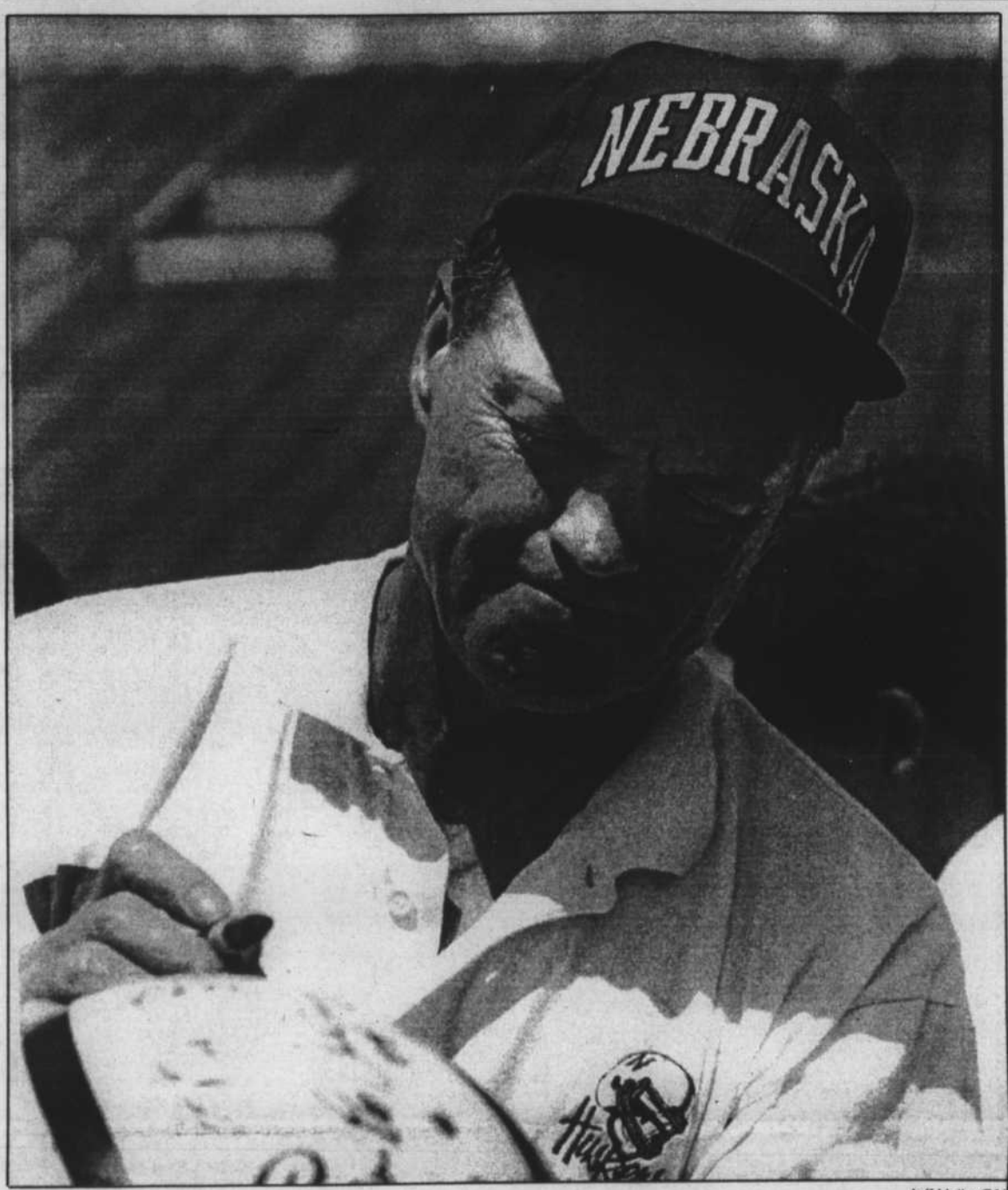
On defense, Butkus Award candidate Travis Hill heads the linebacker corps, which is responsible for three of the seven defensive starters returning from last season.

Mike Anderson and David White round out the returning linebackers, as Kevin Ramaekers and John Parrilla come back at defensive tackle and Steve Carmer and Tyrone Byrd return at the safety positions.

Punter Mike Suggs and place-kicker Byron Bennett also return to their specialist positions.

One newcomer to the starting lineup will be at quarterback. Fifth-year senior Mike Grant, who sat out last year as a redshirt, will compete with redshirt freshman Tony Veland to replace last year's All-Big Eight performer Kei-

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Jeff Haller/DN

Signs of the season

Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne autographs a helmet at the Cornhuskers' annual Photo Day Aug. 12. Osborne, who is entering his 20th year as head coach, has compiled a 186-43-3 record at Nebraska and is the nation's winningest active coach.

Quarterback race adds familiarity to fall camp

By Jeff Singer
Senior Reporter

If nothing else looks familiar in the Nebraska football camp this fall, at least one mainstay is sticking around:

The quarterback question.

For the fourth straight year, the Cornhuskers entered fall practice without a clear-cut choice as the top signal caller.

This year, two candidates for the job entered practice as No. 1 on the depth chart: senior Mike Grant and redshirt freshman Tony Veland.

Grant, a fifth-year senior and a

native of Tampa, Fla., said he expected this year's quarterback race to be close.

"It's going to be tight," Grant said. "I feel that any one of the quarterbacks can fulfill the job, and Coach Osborne won't put anyone on the field who's not ready."

Grant sat out last season as a redshirt, as seniors Keithen McCant, Mickey Joseph and Tom Haase competed for last year's starting spot.

Grant said that just because he was the most experienced of this year's candidates, he shouldn't automatically be the starter.

"If you get the job because you're

QUARTERBACK PREVIEW



a senior, you're going to get a bitter taste in your mouth," he said.

Veland took over for Grant in spring practice when Grant suffered a broken collarbone, and the Omaha native pushed himself into a tie for the top position with a good spring.

"There's a lot of competition and we have a lot of talent," Veland said. "Nothing is set and anything can happen, so it's kind of up in the air

right now."

Veland said all he can do is perform his best and see where he ends up.

"I'm going to try my best, and if Coach Osborne thinks I'm the man, then I'll be in there," he said.

Osborne said he didn't see an advantage for either quarterback.

"Veland had the best spring, partly because Grant was hurt," Osborne said. "Grant worked hard in the summer and did the best he's ever done to prepare himself; so right now they're dead even."

Joel Cornwell, a senior from Carrollton, Mo., is listed third on the depth chart. Behind Cornwell is re-

freshman Brook Berringer and senior Jon McMillen.

A pair of 1992 recruits could also challenge the top two quarterback spots. Tommie Frazier and Ben Rutz, both highly touted coming out of high school, have drawn Osborne's praise.

"The two freshmen quarterbacks are excellent players — they throw well and run well; we've been very pleased with what we've seen," Osborne said. "Whether they can compete in the top two, I don't know."

Two 1990 recruits transferred during the summer. Todd Gragnano, a sophomore, transferred to Louisville and Matt Jones, a junior, transferred to Southern Illinois.

Poll predicts tight race for Big Eight title

By Nick Hytek
Senior Reporter

If the preseason Big Eight football poll is any indication of what the actual race will be like, the Orange Bowl welcoming committee won't be able to extend its hospitality until Dec. 5.

By that time, Nebraska will have played Kansas State in the last game of the conference schedule and the final Big Eight standings will fall into place.

In the closest ballot in the history of the poll, released last week, Colorado received one point more than Nebraska to take the top spot. Oklahoma was third.

The close margin of the balloting reflects the wide open conference race, Big Eight football writers said.

"I see Colorado, Nebraska and Oklahoma in a dead heat — one of those should win," said Mike Baldwin of The Oklahoman.

"I lean toward Colorado," he said. "They've had two good recruiting classes."

Bob Dutton of the Kansas City Star said he also favored Colorado.

"It will come down to the Nebraska-Colorado game," he said.

Dutton also picked Colorado to win the conference.

"Colorado has shown they can win the big games," he said.

Butch Brooks of the Rocky Mountain News said he favored Nebraska.

"I pick Nebraska," he said, "basing that on three things: the running game they've got coming back, a better-than-average line and the fact they're playing Colorado in Lincoln."

"I think it's their turn to beat Colorado." But question marks on each team makes any prediction difficult, Brooks said.

At Colorado, it's a new offense installed before last season's Blockbuster Bowl.

"The big question mark for Colorado is

going to be the offense," Brooks said. "Their defense will keep them in a lot of games."

Dutton said Nebraska also had many holes to fill. All three agreed that Oklahoma, with only three starters returning on defense, will have a hard time competing with Colorado and Nebraska.

Possibly sneaking into the Orange Bowl picture is Kansas, Brooks said.

"This may be the breakthrough year for Kansas," he said.

Baldwin agreed.

"If any team is a sleeper, it's Kansas," he said.

But don't look for the Orange Bowl to have major national championship implications, Baldwin said. In his opinion, the Big Eight is not on the same level as the top teams in the country.

"I'd be very surprised if any of the top three (in the Big Eight) are in the top five (nationally) at the end of the year," he said.

1992 Big Eight football poll

Colorado edged Nebraska 639-638 in a poll of writers from around the Big Eight. A look at the complete results of the poll.

	1st	2nd	3rd	total
Colorado	34	31	21	639
Nebraska	31	32	26	638
Oklahoma	26	27	31	619
Kansas	-	-	13	443
Kansas State	-	-	-	338
Missouri	-	-	-	242
Iowa State	-	-	-	214
Oklahoma State	-	-	-	147

Scott Maurer/DN